

Feeling stressed is a normal, healthy response to life's events and challenges. The ability to react under stress is crucial for human survival.

- › **Focus on the positives.** Recognize that for everything that may go wrong, there may be multiple things that go right.
- › **Break from routines at work and home.** Monotony also can cause stress. Remember you can change the script of your life.
- › **Examine your thought patterns.** Often it is our thoughts that determine whether we interpret a situation as stressful. Listen to your inner voice to discover patterns that may be contributing to your stress level. Write down positive responses to that inner voice so you can access these responses the next time you feel stressed.
- › **Learn to delegate responsibilities.** If you are a manager, empower your subordinates to take on more responsibilities and make more decisions. Delegate tasks fairly and reasonably. Remember that as you delegate a task, you have to set aside your need to have it completed exactly the same way you would have done it. Otherwise, you will end up feeling more stressed.
- › **Be assertive in your responses to requests.** Be honest, but tactful. Learn to seek alternatives or to say no appropriately.
- › **Get organized.** Rearrange your workspace for maximum efficiency. Create lists and schedules to help you meet deadlines. Consider creating a to-do list on your calendar, PDA or computer.

Personal Life Tips

- › **Get enough rest.** Doctors recommend at least eight hours of sleep a night for adults.
- › **Exercise regularly.** Swimming, running, brisk walking, aerobic exercises and other repetitive fitness activities are especially beneficial. Exercise at least 20 to 30 minutes three to five times a week.
- › **Engage in fulfilling activities.** Take a little time each day for: a hobby, a walk, a good book or a home-improvement project.
- › **Avoid caffeine, nicotine and other stimulants.** These common drugs actually can induce stress and anxiety.
- › **Avoid alcohol, tranquilizers and recreational drugs.** These may contribute to depression, anxiety and a sense of loss of control.

Workplace Tips

- › **Tackle one task at a time if possible.** List your duties in order of priority, and complete one at a time. Tackle the easiest ones first.
- › **Do not procrastinate.** Putting off important tasks can lead to increased worry. It is more important to get started than it is to complete the project perfectly.
- › **Exercise during lunchtime.** This is important especially for those who sit most of the day. Simple steps like taking the stairs or walking for 15 minutes at lunchtime can have a positive effect on your stress level (and your waistline).

Relaxation 101

Try these techniques to help you relax and reduce stress:

- › **Breathing exercises**—Drawing slow, deep breaths from the diaphragm (the spot just under your rib cage) promotes a more efficient exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide than chest or shoulder breathing. Exhale slowly and evenly.
- › **Yoga and stretching exercises**—These can relieve tension, make you more limber, and produce an overall calming effect.
- › **Meditation and imagery techniques**—By sitting in a comfortable, quiet environment, closing your eyes and freeing your mind from its concerns for even a few minutes each day, you can learn to achieve relaxation quickly.
- › **Progressive muscle-relaxation techniques**—These involve systematically tensing, relaxing and visualizing each major muscle group. For example, make a fist and hold it tight for at least five seconds. Feel the tension in your hand and arm. Relax your hand, and visualize the tension escaping your body. Do the same with your neck, your face, limbs, etc.

For more information on this and other topics contact GuidanceResources or your HR department.

Stress is an inevitable part of our lives. Learning how to identify and manage stress can help prevent physical and psychological problems, increase your chances of future success and promote a longer, healthier life.

Effects of Stress

The way we think and respond to life's challenges promotes stress. For example, the more impatient, demanding, controlling or submissive we are, the more we are bound to experience stress. Stress can be a learned response. Certain high risk or demanding professions, such as law enforcement and teaching, can also be stressful.

To a certain degree, feeling stressed is a normal, healthy response to life's events and challenges. The ability to react under stress is crucial for human survival. It is natural for our bodies to trigger a fight-or-flight response to potentially dangerous situations. A stressful stimulus promotes a chemical reaction that produces adrenaline and increases energy.

However, over time the body's continued response to regular stress can lead to an increase in blood pressure and heart rate, heightened anxiety and an overall strain on the system.

Immediate Physiological Symptoms:

- › Hyperventilation
- › Profuse sweating
- › Rapid heartbeat
- › Increased urination
- › Dizziness
- › Fatigue

Conditions Linked to Stress:

- › Musculoskeletal pain (e.g., back/neck pain)
- › Migraines and headaches
- › Sleep and appetite disturbances
- › Gastrointestinal disorders
- › Skin diseases
- › Cardiovascular disorders
- › Colitis
- › Irritable bowel syndrome
- › Diabetes
- › Asthma

Behavioral Symptoms of Stress:

- › Irritability
- › Social withdrawal
- › Anxiety
- › Lack of concentration
- › Substance abuse
- › Forgetfulness
- › Bad habits (e.g., biting nails or grinding teeth)
- › Inability to act due to fear or indecision

Ways to Cope with Stress

- › **Seek support.** Do not wait until you reach your breaking point. Ask a therapist for advice and resources to help you cope with stress. Recognize and admit that you are feeling anxious and stressed. Pay attention to your body's physical signs of stress.
- › **Try to identify the causes of stress.** By recognizing the real reasons behind tension, you can learn to feel in control and change the source of stress. If you are not sure why you feel stressed, retrace your steps; perhaps it stems from a forgotten event from yesterday or a disturbing dream.
- › **Ask yourself these five questions:**
 1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
 2. Is there anything more I can do to improve the situation?
 3. How will this outcome affect my life in the long run?
 4. What can I learn from this?
 5. What advice would I give to someone else in this situation?
- › **Accept stress as an everyday part of life.** Often the best way to cope is to "go with the flow"—to accept those stressors that you can not currently change.
- › **Laugh and learn.** Instead of getting irritated, laugh at life's annoyances and learn from your mistakes. Humor is a powerful tool in helping build resilience—the ability to bounce back from negative events.
- › **Nurture those relationships that matter.** More interpersonal contact with the right people can help relieve stress. Open up to others about your problems and accept help offered. Spend less time with negative, stress-inducing friends or coworkers.
- › **Develop short- and long-term goals.** List challenging but realistic objectives for your career and personal life. Analyze and update these goals over time. Avoid setting unrealistic expectations and too many lofty goals. Attempt challenges that are doable and tackle the easiest first.

